

TRANSPORTATION REPORT

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The Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill Passes Big Hurdle in House Transportation & Infrastructure Bill

The ATA (American Trucking Association) and the AAR (Association of American Railroad) have issued a joint press announcement that they are in agreement on heavier truck weights for the nation's trucks in the new Surface Transportation Reauthorization (STR) bill being considered by the House.

When the bill was introduced to the House T&I committee in late January, it included a provision allowing states to permit trucks weighing up to 97,000 pounds and triple-trailer combinations on highways. Be mindful in all but a few states the current gross vehicle weight limit is 80,000 pounds, and use of triples is restricted to only a few states.

The AAR rallied (no pun intended) against the increased truck weights and found allies in safety advocates, state police, Public Citizen, the Teamsters union and AAA. What ensued was a battle of the giants and in the end on the Feb 3rd version of the House T&I bill - no increased weights were in the bill.

That action by the Committee - brought an all out assault by the NHTSA - calling for the largest fly-in of trucking companies, truck shippers and truck advocacy groups in history.

No Congressional representative wants to choose between their friends....and it is pretty clear that the railroads actions opposing the higher weights - put many of their pet projects in a precarious footing with some of the Committee members.

It is 'get down the road' time the Congress on this issue. Some fret out loud that even though this heavier weight is allowed in the House bill - the Senate bill might not be compatible. It is clear to veteran transportation bill watchers that this is only one skirmish in many that will be on-going over the next two - four weeks as the House and Senate Surface Transportation bills advance. Remember that so far the House bill is a five year bill and the Senate is a two year bill - lots of compromising must be done to get these bills together.

As stated yesterday in our Transportation email, a Senate committee on Tuesday approved a \$9.6 billion package to help plug a \$12 billion shortfall in a bipartisan two-year surface transportation bill (Senate Finance Committee) - still more to go on filling the shortfall. The full Senate voted 85-11 on Thursday to clear the bill for debate as early as next week.

Editor's Note: It continues to be troubling that the AAR - RR's fight against efficiency of other transportation modes, any possible shippers gains as opposed to lobbying for their own transportation mode. Here the RR's had to blink or risk losing some of their own pet projects in the new STR.